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SUBJECT: ELECTIONS UPDATE MAY 7

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On May 6 President Saakashvili stated publicly that United National Movement (UNM) intimidation of local officials will not be tolerated. The Minister of Internal Affairs (MOIA) publicly made a similar statement the same day telling police their role is to provide a safe environment for elections, but not to interfere with them or show support for any one candidate. The Ministry of Health has postponed a door-to-door assessment until after elections to ensure that the local populace will not misconstrue the survey as an elections-related activity. Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and GoG officials appear to be suffering a disconnect, with ODIHR seeing all public servants as representatives of the ruling UNM and GoG fretting that ODIHR sees Parliamentary elections through the prism of January 5 Presidential Elections. End Comment.

Saakashvili--Intimidation will not be Tolerated

¶2. (SBU) On May 6, in a meeting with locals in Batumi on the fourth anniversary of the reintegration of Adjara into GoG control, President Saakashvili said that intimidation will not be tolerated in the run up to elections. His remarks came a day after United National Movement (UNM) majoritarian candidate from Tsageri (northwest Georgia) Valeri Giorgobiani officially withdrew from the race after being caught on audiotape threatening to dismiss local government employees if they did not deliver 80 percent of the vote for UNM. Saakashvili underscored to officials that the upcoming elections were a matter of national security.

¶3. (SBU) Also, on May 6, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MOIA) issued a public statement to remind MOIA officers and personnel that electoral law prevents them from interfering with pre-election process in favor of any candidate. The statement underlines that the main goal of police is to ensure and promote a safe environment for candidates to participate in the elections, as well as for their supporters.

¶4. (SBU) MOIA officials told Ambassador on May 6 in a meeting with the OSCE and other Ambassadors, that the Ministry of Health (MOH) has postponed its door-to-door needs assessment until after the election. They acknowledged that the timing of the assessment has been problematic and confusing for voters, who often interpreted the work of MOH as affiliated with elections related activity of the Central Election Commission (CEC) or political party representatives. GoG officials said postponing the survey will avoid confusion and misinterpretation.

ODIHR and GOG Disconnect

¶5. (SBU) At the same meeting, the MOIA representatives expressed their frustration with ODIHR election monitoring representatives whom they feel are looking at the Parliamentary elections solely through the prism of the

January 5 Presidential elections. The local representative of the Council of Europe said this was also his impression. The MOIA officials also chafe at the way that ODIHR treats all civil servants as virulent supporters of the UNM. When the Ambassador asked if ODIHR was meeting regularly with the GOG Interagency Task Force on Elections, the answer was "no." They only meet weekly in a formal setting. OSCE Ambassador Hakala said she would work on this directly with ODIHR Elections Monitoring Chief Frlec, seeking to open a daily channel of communication.

TEFFT